DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 587 CG 023 580

AUTHOR Passman, Richard H.; Tomlin, Angela M.
TITLE Do Mothers Accept Grandmothers' Advice When Disciplining Their Children?
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (63rd, Chicago, IL, May 2-4, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Discipline; Family Relationship; Females; *Grandparents; *Mothers; *Parent Child Relationship

ABSTRACT

Research has not investigated ways in which grandparents indirectly influence grandchildren through interactions with the parents. This study was conducted to investigate factors affecting mothers' willingness to accept suggestions from their own mothers about disciplining their child. The study also examined whether mothers' disciplinary actions influenced subsequent advice from the grandmothers. Subjects were 40 mothers of 9-year-old children and their own mothers (maternal grandmothers). Mothers and grandmothers were told that they would be helping their child learn puzzle tasks. Mothers gave or removed candies for successes or errors, and grandmothers independently advised mothers about this disciplining. Via computer screens, grandmothers' suggestions were displayed to mothers and mothers' disciplinary decisions were shown to grandmothers; however, all information provided was sham. Siginficant effects revealed that mothers receiving grandmothers' advice to increase punishing did so gradually over trials. Mothers receiving initially punitive advice that abated immediately raised their punitiveness and maintained these high levels. Mothers' rewarding patterns paralleled their punishing. Grandmothers' actual suggestions regarding reward and punishment were comparably influenced by the timing and feedback received about the mothers' punishing. Mothers and grandmothers responded faster when advice or feedback was intensely punitive. When grandmothers were highly responsible for the child, mothers were more likely to conform to the grandmothers' advice. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED335587

DO MOTHERS ACCEPT GRANDMOTHERS' ADVICE WHEN DISCIPLINING THEIR CHILDREN?

Richard H. Passman

Angela M. Tomlin

CG023580

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☑ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard H. Passman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

DO MOTHERS ACCEPT GRANDMOTHERS' ADVICE WHEN DISCIPLINING THEIR CHILDREN?

Most past work regarding grandparenthood investigated the direct effects of grandparents on grandchildren. Grandparents completed questionnaires or were interviewed regarding, for example, their grandparenting style (Robertson, 1977). Less frequently, grandchildren gave their ideas about their grandparents (Hartshorne and Manaster, 1982). Most recently, empirical studies of three-generational families have involved observations of grandmothers, mothers, and grandchildren in disciplinary (Blackwelder & Passman, 1986) and attachment (Tomlin & Passman, 1989) situations. Apparently, however, no studies have investigated ways in which grandparents indirectly influence grandchildren through interactions with the parents. The purpose of the present study was to investigate factors effecting mothers' willingness to accept suggestions from their own mothers about disciplining their child. The second aim was to examine whether mothers' disciplinary actions influence subsequent advice from grandmothers.

Mothers (mean age = 36.2 years) and maternal grandmothers (mean age = 61.8 years) of 9-year-olds participated. Each family member was escorted to a separate room. Mothers and grandmothers were told that they were to help teach their child puzzle tasks. Mothers gave or removed candies for successes and errors, and grandmothers independently advised mothers about this disciplining. Via computer screens, grandmothers' suggestions were displayed to mothers and mothers' disciplinary decisions were shown to grandmothers.

Actually, however, all information provided was sham. Children's "performances" were pre-programmed random sequences of 50% successes and errors. Grandmothers' "advice" to mothers and the mothers' "decisions" presented to

grandmothers were both manipulated to appear either to increase or decrease in punitiveness. After 20 trials to obtain a baseline, increasing punitiveness began: Both grandmothers' advice and mothers' decisions appeared to remove 2 ($\pm$1) candies, then 5 ($\pm$1), then 8 ($\pm$1) over 60 additional trials. (Decreasing punitiveness started with 8 and diminished to 5, and then to 2).

Mean magnitude and latencies of mothers' and grandmothers' rewarding and punishing (8 measures) were evaluated through two (increasing or decreasing punitiveness) X 2 (child's sex) X 4 (trial) MANOVAs. Significant effects (ps <.01) revealed that mothers receiving grandmothers' "advice" to increase punishing did so gradually over trials (Table 1). Mothers receiving initially punitive advice that abated immediately raised their punitiveness and maintained these high levels. Mothers' rewarding patterns paralleled their punishing. Grandmothers' actual suggestions regarding reward and punishment (Table 1) were comparably influenced by the timing and feedback received about the mothers' punishing. Moreover, mothers and grandmothers responded faster when advice or feedback was intensely punitive.

Behavioral data were correlated with questionnaire items concerning the degree of responsibility that the grandmothers assumed for the grandchild. With high grandmotherly responsibility, mothers adhered closely to grandmothers' advice; however, grandmothers were relatively uninfluenced by mothers' disciplining decisions. These high responsibility grandmothers indirectly influenced their grandchild's treatment by their effects on the mothers' behavior. Grandmothers who assumed less responsibility made suggestions that matched what the mothers seemed already to be doing. Such grandmothers may have adopted a strategy of non-interference with ongoing parental discipline.

DO MOTHERS ACCEPT GRANDMOTHERS' ADVICE WHEN DISCIPLINING THEIR CHILDREN?

Richard H. Passman and Angela M. Tomlin
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

One of the traditional or popular roles of the grandmother is that of advisor to the parents. The relationship between an adult woman and her mother is thought to be strengthened by the arrival of grandchildren. The child provides new opportunities for them to share information, especially information regarding child rearing practices. In fact, as anyone who is expecting a child can attest, an increase in contact and counseling by the grandmother-to-be to the mother-to-be often begins during the pregnancy. Such a relationship will often continue as the children get older.

Tinsley and Parke stated that, in addition to providing emotional support during and after a pregnancy, grandmothers may often exert an indirect influence over their grandchildren by providing the mother with "advice, information, and modeling of child-rearing skills" . Several interview studies have supported this view by demonstrating that personality traits, values', and parenting behaviors can be transmitted through generations.

Despite the rather common-sense notion that parents will turn to an experienced grandparent for information about child-rearing, to date most research has not investigated this area. In general, studies about grandparents have emphasized their direct

influence on the grandchildren.

The purpose of the present study was to demonstrate empirically a situation in which maternal grandmothers may influence mothers' actions toward their children. Of particular interest was whether guidance from maternal grandmothers may influence decisions mothers make about rewarding and punishing their children. Another aim was to evaluate how mothers' acceptance or rejection of grandmothers' counsel affected the grandmothers' future advice.

Because children's behaviors and reactions to parental discipline strategies can vary substantially, the present study, like several previous studies, used an analogue procedure in which children's responses to parental discipline were predetermined and thereby standardized. In this case, a stable performance rate of 50% successes and 50% errors was selected. That is, children performing on a task that their mother was monitoring appeared to be steadily proceeding at a 50% success rate. Utilization of this procedure avoids the ethical problems inherent in studies about discipline, and also allows systematic and direct comparison of the control techniques chosen by subjects. Earlier work by Passman and others has found that mothers' and fathers' responses in such experimental situations are significantly related to their reported use of discipline at home. This finding increases the external validity of the analogue procedure.

Forty families consisting of 8-10 year-old boys and girls, their mothers, and their maternal grandmothers each participated. After completing informed consent forms and being oriented to the general procedures, each family member was escorted to a separate room. Mothers and grandmothers began to answer demographic questionnaires presented via computer screens and were told that the children were receiving instructions about the experimental tasks. In reality, all children were playing in a supervised setting and continued to do so for the duration of the procedure.

Once the demographic information was obtained, mothers and grandmothers answered questions regarding the degree to which the grandmother was viewed as having responsibility toward the rearing of the grandchild.

The mothers and grandmothers were then told that the purpose of the study was to examine how family members help their children with simple, age-appropriate tasks. Specific details about the tasks were kept to a minimum so that the women could impose their own interpretations and increase the likelihood of their reacting as they might typically do at home. The instructions further led the mothers to believe that, after the child made a correct choice on the task, the word "success" would appear on the computer screen, to signal the opportunity to select a reward of 0-9 candies. Similarly, the mother would see the word "error" when the child appeared to make a mistake, and she would then have the chance to remove 0-9 candies as a punishment. In all cases, the

mother could ignore apparent success or failure by choosing 0.

Grandmothers' instructions varied slightly: Instead of directly taking away candies from their grandchild, they were asked to advise the mother about how many candies to remove from the child. This information from the grandmother was to be provided to the mother prior to her final decision. As feedback to the grandmother, the mothers' decisions were sometime displayed to the grandmothers following an error by the child.

To summarize briefly, mothers were told they would help their child learn a task by rewarding success (giving candies) and punishing errors (removing candies). Grandmothers were told they would help the mothers decide how many candies to remove for an error or give for a success. Grandmothers would also get to see the effects of their advice by being shown the mothers' subsequent decisions for errors.

In reality, all of the mothers' decisions that were shown to the grandmothers and all the grandmothers' suggestions provided to the mothers were sham and pre-programmed by computer. The sham advice and sham decisions were programmed to either appear to increase in punitiveness or decrease in punitiveness. For the half of the families in the increasing punitiveness group, the mothers' decisions and the grandmothers' advice changed from an average of 2 candies removed to 5 and then to 8 candies removed. The decreasing groups viewed an opposite pattern, 8 candies removed,

then 5, then 2.

A 20 trial baseline was conducted first, in which no advice or decision was provided. Then, 60 more trials were given in which the grandmothers' punitive advice and the mothers' punitive decisions either started low and then became increasingly severe, or started high and the became weaker.

Eight measures were recorded during each of the four 20-trial periods. Four involved magnitudes: mothers' mean magnitude of reward (number of candies given following apparent successes by the child), mothers' mean magnitude of punishment (candies deducted following errors), grandmothers' mean magnitude of advising reward, and grandmothers' mean magnitude of advising punishment. The remaining four were latency measures: mothers' mean latency to reward (time from the word, "success" appeared on the screen until a consequence was chosen), mothers' mean latency to punish, grandmothers' mean latency to advise reward, and grandmothers' mean latency to advise punishment.

A 2 (Group-Increasing or decreasing punitiveness) x 2 (Sex of Child) x 4 (Period) MANOVA was conducted for both the four magnitude measures and the four latency measures. Mothers generally intensified their punishing over time, but a difference in when the intensification occurred was seen. For both groups, the largest increase in the mothers' discipline was found when the grandmother appeared to be suggesting the most severe punishment. That is, the greatest punitiveness occurred either in period 2 or

4, depending on when the grandmothers' recommendations seemed to be most punitive. Mothers' rewarding increased in a similar pattern. Thus, mothers appeared to conform their own behaviors to fit what they believed the grandmother was doing.

Grandmothers' patterns of advising reward and punishment tended to follow the same pattern as did the mothers, although the results of the some of the tests were not significant. When the mothers appeared to be punishing severely, grandmothers' advise about both punishing and rewarding increased.

For the latencies, the general trend was for both mothers and grandmothers was to choose to punish or advise punishment more quickly over time and to punish most quickly when the feedback from the other appeared to be most harsh. Choices made for reward changed similarly.

The mothers' and grandmothers' views of the grandmothers' responsibility toward the grandchild were correlated with the ways the women behaved during the session. Areas of responsibility were providing physical care to the child, teaching and socializing the child, disciplining the child, having authority over the child, providing the child emotional care, and influencing decisions about the child.

When grandmothers' were highly responsible for the child, mothers were more likely to conform to the grandmothers' advice.

The finding supports the common-sense notion that mothers are most willing to accept advice from knowledgeable and concerned grandmothers.

Interestingly, when we look at the inverse, the grandmothers who had the highest levels of reported responsibility did not conform their advice to fit with the mothers' behaviors. They, instead, performed independently . This finding may, perhaps, account for the less robust findings regarding the grandmothers.

Perhaps low responsibility grandmothers typically do not give advice and did not feel comfortable doing so during the sessions, whereas those who typically take on much responsibility were at ease in the advisory role.

In general, this study supports the stereotypic view that grandmothers have an impact on their grandchildren's lives by their influence on the middle generation. It is clear that multi-generational interactions are complex and difficult to study (not to mention difficult to experience).

REFERENCES

Blackwelder, D.E., & Passman, R.H. (1986). Grandmothers' and mothers' disciplining in three-generational families: The role of social responsibility in rewarding and punishing grandchildren. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50, 80-86.

Hartshorne, T.S., & Manaster, G.J. (1982). The relationship with grandparents: Contact, importance, role conception. International Journal of Aging and Human Development, 15, 233-246.

Robertson, J.T. (1977). Grandmotherhood: A study of role conceptions. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 39, 165-174.

Tinsley, B.R., & Parke, R.D. (1984). Grandparents as support and socialization agents. In M. Lewis (Ed.), Beyond the Dyad. New York: Plenum Press (pages 161-194).

Tomlin, A.M., & Passman, R.H. (1989). Grandmothers' responsibility in raising two-year-olds facilitates their grandchildren's adaptive behavior: A preliminary intrafamilial investigation of mothers' and maternal grandmothers' effects. Psychology and Aging, 4, 119-121.

Table 1
Mothers' and Grandmothers' Mean Magnitude of Discipline.

	Period				
Disciplinary Pattern	Baseline	2	3	4	Mean
Mother			Punishment		
Increasing	1.83 (1.78)	1.87 (1.25)	2.91 (1.66)	4.24 (2.41)	2.71 (2.01)
Decreasing	2.53 (1.69)	3.85 (2.15)	4.52 (1.81)	4.96 (2.38)	2.16 (2.16)
Mean	2.18 (1.77)	2.86 (2.02)	3.71 (1.92)	4.60 (2.40)	3.34 (2.17)
			Reward		
Increasing	4.64 (2.52)	4.94 (2.47)	5.52 (2.39)	6.30 (2.40)	5.35 (2.44)
Decreasing	5.18 (2.48)	7.03 (1.80)	6.64 (2.09)	6.89 (2.02)	6.44 (2.16)
Mean	4.91 (2.51)	5.98 (2.40)	6.08 (2.31)	6.60 (2.24)	5.89 (2.36)
Grandmother			Punishment		
Increasing	2.41 (2.38)	2.30 (2.07)	2.54 (1.75)	2.99 (2.03)	2.55 (2.01)
Decreasing	2.16 (1.51)	3.34 (2.07)	3.97 (2.31)	3.76 (2.26)	3.31 (2.10)
Mean	2.29 (2.01)	2.82 (2.18)	3.25 (2.23)	3.38 (2.23)	2.94 (2.12)
			Reward		
Increasing	4.68 (2.57)	4.95 (2.71)	5.15 (2.53)	5.81 (2.12)	5.15 (2.43)
Decreasing	5.10 (2.22)	6.91 (2.02)	6.95 (1.86)	6.46 (1.87)	6.36 (2.06)
Mean	4.89 (2.42)	5.93 (2.60)	6.05 (2.39)	6.14 (2.01)	5.75 (2.33)

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.